



NEWS RELEASE

**New York State
Unified Court System**

**Hon. Joseph A. Zayas
Chief Administrative Judge**

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Chief Administrative Judge Zayas Announces Criminal Case Management Innovations

New Protocols Aim to Reduce Felony Case Delays

NEW YORK CITY—Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas and First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George today announced a series of innovations in court operations to help expedite the processing of felony cases and reduce unnecessary delays in New York City’s criminal courts, enhancing both fairness and public safety. Chief among these new measures are protocols to more effectively and efficiently oversee the discovery process at every stage, identify and resolve obstacles to ensure that cases are trial-ready, and monitor timelines throughout the progression of the case. The court system is collaborating with the Center for Justice Innovation (CJI) in developing and instituting these measures as one element of a broader plan to address criminal case backlogs. The initiative will draw on lessons learned by CJI during stakeholder engagement sessions and other research funded by the Governor’s Office aimed at identifying causes of delay in criminal proceedings in New York City and developing strategies for minimizing them. With the mandated closing of Rikers Island approaching, the court system is keenly aware that the efficient management of criminal cases will be critical in ensuring that the City’s jail population does not exceed the capacity of the new borough-based facilities.

In the past several years, a number of factors have contributed to delays in the resolution of criminal cases, and a corresponding increase in the size of New York City’s jail population, including the severe restrictions on court operations that were imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the coinciding spike in violent crime in New York City, as well as new criminal discovery laws that took effect in 2020 which, notwithstanding their positive effects, have prolonged the litigation of many criminal cases. To address these issues, OCA and CJI, in collaboration with our justice system partners, will be implementing the following measures, first in cases involving incarcerated defendants:

- At the outset of cases, judges will issue scheduling orders that, among other goals, prioritize the early disclosure of key evidence, set firm yet realistic deadlines for discovery compliance, and schedule mandatory off-calendar conferences, at which discovery disputes can be resolved quickly.
- Once the case has moved past the preliminary stage, courts will consistently conduct pretrial suppression hearings early in the proceedings—rather than shortly before trial—so that both sides can realistically assess the strengths and vulnerabilities of their witnesses and evidence.
- Building on a strategy developed in New York County Supreme Court-Criminal Term, the court will employ a team of court attorneys to conduct late-stage case conferencing with prosecutors and defense attorneys to identify and resolve any outstanding issues to ensure the case is trial-ready as scheduled.
- Cases will be closely monitored via a citywide calendaring system, providing prosecutors and defense attorneys, who often juggle large caseloads, advanced notice regarding the timeline of hearings and trials—thus, enabling court administrators to set firm deadlines and hold all parties accountable.

These reforms will be launched in Brooklyn later this fall under the direction of Kings County Supreme Court-Criminal Term Administrative Judge Matthew D’Emic, with plans to tailor these new case management strategies to the needs of each of New York City’s four other boroughs before rolling them out citywide early next year.

“Under New York’s speedy trial law, felonies must be ready to be tried within six months of indictment, misdemeanors within 90 days. Both the U.S. and New York Constitutions also guarantee the right to a speedy trial. In a criminal justice system where more than 97% of cases are resolved without a trial, the backlogs and delays long endemic to the system are inexcusable. We are not here to point fingers, but to join hands with our many partners to identify and implement innovative protocols such as those we are launching in Brooklyn, as well diversionary programs that could replace both pretrial and post-conviction incarceration with therapeutic approaches in appropriate cases. Victims, defendants, and the public deserve a criminal justice system that proceeds swiftly, intelligently, and compassionately,” said **Chief Judge Rowan D. Wilson**.

“While our administrative and trial judges are already working hard to monitor the oldest cases in their courthouses and address systemic causes of delay, I believe we can and must do more to address obstacles in resolving these serious cases,” said **Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas**. “Efficiently operating criminal courts are an essential component of our justice system, and we must not accept a status quo that routinely tolerates excessive delay. The scheduled closing of the Rikers Island jails provides an added incentive to explore new strategies to ensure that serious criminal cases do not languish, while the accused waits in jail and victims and witnesses wait for resolution and closure. The adoption of these common-sense case-processing innovations, starting in Brooklyn and soon extending citywide, will minimize unnecessary case delays—ultimately helping to reduce the amount of time defendants spend in Rikers Island awaiting resolution of their cases—as we seek to balance public

safety and the rights of individuals awaiting trial. I am confident that, with our experienced, dedicated team of judges and nonjudicial personnel and the support of the Center for Justice Innovation and our other justice partners, we can achieve these crucial goals. I look forward to the progress ahead.”

“This proactive, hands-on approach will have a profound and far-reaching impact and go a long way in streamlining the management of these cases to advance their readiness for trial as appropriate. I am grateful to the Center for Justice Innovation, led by Courtney Bryan, for its guidance on this vital initiative, to Judge Ellen Biben and her team for their creativity in developing a key component of the plan, and to Judge Matthew D’Emic for taking the helm in introducing and refining these innovative case-management protocols as we look to implement them throughout New York City,” said **First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George**.

“One of the most fundamental responsibilities of our justice system is to provide a speedy trial. It’s how we ensure innocent people can move on with their lives and keep dangerous criminals off our streets. I’m proud to have worked with Chief Administrative Judge Zayas to help drive these reforms and I am grateful for his leadership in delivering the changes our courts need,” said **New York State Governor Kathy Hochul**.

“Justice delayed is justice denied. Backlogs and delays in our criminal justice system are unfair to defendants, victims, families, and witnesses. I am grateful to Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for putting in place these common-sense measures to make our court system operate more effectively and efficiently,” said **Letitia James, New York State Attorney General**.

“As the Administrative Judge of Kings County Criminal Term, and a member of the Independent Rikers Commission, I am gratified that this vital effort is launching in Brooklyn. Efficient case management is integral to the fair administration of justice, ensuring defendants their earliest possible day in court and lessening the anxiety of victims and witnesses. This is especially true as we deal with eliminating backlogs caused by the pandemic, which is so necessary to the closing of Rikers Island. I know that with the collaboration of our partners from the District Attorney’s Office, the defense bar, and in City and State government, this initiative will be a success,” said **Hon. Matthew J. D’Emic, Administrative Judge for Criminal Matters, Kings County Supreme Court and Presiding Judge, Brooklyn Domestic Violence and Mental Health Courts**.

“During the pandemic, cases languished for far too long, causing extreme backlogs gravely impacting our city’s jails, and although our public servants work tirelessly to ensure our justice system moves timely, reforms were greatly needed,” said **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**. “Chief Administrative Judge Zayas’s decision to enforce innovative policies like issuing scheduling orders for cases is smart and effective and will allow our criminal justice system to clear the backlog of cases and more efficiently serve New Yorkers.”

“The efficiency of our court system is of paramount importance to the effective administration of justice in New York City,” said **Deanna Logan, Director, New York City Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ)**. “As the city’s criminal justice coordinator, MOCJ is committed to working with the Office of Court Administration and other public safety partners to move this initiative forward collaboratively, employing real-time city and court data to measure the outcomes that help ensure that New York City remains the nation’s safest big city. I applaud Judge Zayas’s efforts to innovate the courts’ processes, and I look forward to our continued partnership.”

“The timely resolution of criminal cases is essential to protecting public safety and ensuring justice is served for victims, communities, and defendants alike,” said **New York City Assistant Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Chauncey Parker**. “This approach will create a more efficient process that upholds fairness and accountability in our justice system, ultimately strengthening New Yorkers’ trust in our courts and promoting a safer city for everyone.”

“New Yorkers deserve to have their cases resolved swiftly. Despite the best efforts of prosecutors in Manhattan and across the City, unnecessary delays due to backlogs and the discovery process occur far too often. We’re grateful to the Chief Administrative Judge for implementing these new protocols, which will expedite processing going forward,” said **Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, Jr.**

“As a former judge, I truly appreciate and understand the court’s role and its mandate to move cases forward with the full cooperation of all stakeholders. I support Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas’s proposal to advance the efficiency of criminal practice in the interest of public safety. Our community benefits when we remove cumbersome roadblocks that can delay justice for victims and defendants. As such, I welcome the court’s initiative to place an urgent focus on discovery challenges and resolve cases swiftly. My attorneys and professional staff are rising to the challenge, working diligently toward this goal of streamlining the discovery process, and we will continue to do so on behalf of the people of the Bronx,” said **Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark**.

“In Brooklyn, we have worked diligently to move cases forward, but the implementation of new discovery laws has, unfortunately, had the opposite effect, slowing down case processing. Our prosecutors have been working hard to tackle these longstanding challenges, ensuring justice is served for victims and the accused without unnecessary delays. I look forward to the courts’ engagement to help resolve these issues. I want to thank my fellow district attorneys for their hard work in handling cases under these difficult circumstances. With the continued leadership of Judges Zayas and St. George, and the collaboration with our colleagues in the defense bar, I am optimistic that we will overcome these obstacles and further improve the efficiency of our justice system,” said **Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez**.

“I welcome OCA’s new case processing protocols. The discovery practice in our criminal courts continues to present obstacles to the fair administration of justice. This initiative confronts one of those challenges head-on by ensuring the prompt and efficient resolution of discovery disputes and avoiding protracted and unnecessary delays. I am grateful for the much-needed attention being given to discovery practice and want to thank Chief Administrative Judge Joseph A. Zayas and First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Norman St. George for their leadership,” said **Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz**.

“Criminal case backlogs have a deleterious effect not only on our criminal justice system but on public safety as a whole. Justice delayed is often justice denied and while the improvement of our criminal justice system is a constant and ongoing process, serious cases should never be allowed to languish in perpetuity. Defendants and victims alike deserve to have their cases heard in an efficient, fair, and timely manner. As Staten Island’s chief law enforcement officer, the men and women of my office are fully committed to the swift dispensation of justice and we thank Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, the New York State Unified Court System, and the Center for Justice Innovation for outlining a proactive set of steps to address criminal case backlogs, and we look forward to working with them and all justice stakeholders as we continue to improve our criminal justice system,” said **Staten Island District Attorney Michael E. McMahon**.

“We are pleased that the Office of Administration is working with all stakeholders to analyze the best ways to make the criminal court system more effective, fair and humane,” said **Tina Luongo, Chief Attorney of the Criminal Defense Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “The key to success of any plan is to ensure the funding and resources for our offices to meet our clients’ needs, especially following the needed reforms to New York’s discovery statute, and that no actions are taken that push efficiency over what is in the best interest and constitutional rights of the people accused. We know that Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas and all of OCA leadership understand this and support the continued funding we require.”

“There is a very serious impact for people who have criminal cases hanging over their heads for a long time. They may be suspended from their jobs, removed from their homes due to orders of protection along with countless other consequences, all of which occur without an adjudication or conviction. The most devastating consequence is incarceration in the dangerous and deadly Rikers Island when a person cannot afford bail,” said **Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services**. “We thank Judge Zayas, the Office of Court Administration, and the Center for Justice Innovation for their collaborative effort, one that included the defenders and other stakeholders, and has resulted in a solution that increases the efficiency of the courts and assures more timely resolutions while continuing to focus on fairness and transparency in these critical and life-altering court proceedings.”

“NYCDS applauds this initiative,” said **Stan Germán, Executive Director of New York County Defender Services**. “Our overriding concern, at all times, is that the legal system operates optimally to protect our clients’ constitutional right to a speedy and fair trial. Systemic inefficiencies interfere with that goal and reduce societal respect for the criminal legal system. We thank Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for his welcome leadership on this issue.”

“I applaud Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, Chief Judge Wilson and the entire OCA team for taking new steps to expedite criminal court protocols and help courts move cases through the system faster while still ensuring that every person receives fair and just treatment under the law. Our State Court system is overburdened and back-logged and the people of New York are suffering the consequences. Whether it be in Housing Court, Family Court, Civil Court or Criminal Court there is an unacceptable level of backlog in our court system. I am a firm believer in the idea that justice delayed is justice denied so I have made it a priority of mine as Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee to work with the Office of Court Administration to do everything in our power to reduce these backlogs. After these new protocols prove successful in Brooklyn I look forward to seeing them adopted in Manhattan, and all across New York City, as well,” said **Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee**.

“I commend Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for taking these proactive steps to help alleviate the tremendous backlog in our courts which has spiraled since the pandemic. This collaboration with the Center for Justice Innovation will result in a more streamlined and efficient resolution of serious felony cases and help ensure we have the system of justice New Yorkers deserve,” said **Assembly Member Charles Lavine, Chair, Assembly Judiciary Committee**.

“Excessive and unnecessary delays in our justice system have exacerbated lengths of stay on Rikers Island, inflating the city's jail population and undermining safety and justice,” said **Adrienne Adams, Speaker, New York City Council**. “I applaud Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, the Office of Court Administration (OCA), and the Center for Justice Innovation for their efforts and leadership advancing solutions to strengthen our court system and reduce case delays. These are critical efforts to help achieve swifter justice for those awaiting trial and victims of crime alike and move us towards the closure of Rikers. I look forward to continuing to work with OCA and all stakeholders to advance the shared goals of improving safety and justice in New York City.”

“Today, Judge Joseph A. Zayas demonstrated the leadership and innovation this City needs to reduce case delays in City jails, by advancing reforms in line with [my office's recommendations](#) to ensure that no one is left waiting three years in the inhumane and violent conditions of Rikers Island for their day in court. From 2019-2023, case delays increased by 179% for felony cases and dramatically inflated our jail population, but with OCA’s commitment to set firm but realistic deadlines for discovery compliance, to triage and expedite criminal cases, and to implement a citywide calendaring system, we can go a long way toward a more efficient and fair criminal court system,” said **Brad Lander, New York City Comptroller**.

“When justice is delayed, justice is denied. I commend Chief Administrative Judge Zayas for implementing new court systems and efficiency measures to move us closer to upholding fundamental civil rights. The backlog of felony cases has created an unsustainable situation where individuals remain incarcerated for prolonged periods awaiting trial,” said **Council Member Sandy Nurse, Chair of the New York City Council Criminal Justice Committee**. “As we approach the mandated closure of Rikers Island, it is essential that we continue these reforms to not only address our operational capacity but also our ethical obligations. Extended pre-trial detention disproportionately harms low-income defendants and destabilizes communities. By streamlining court processes, we ensure that serious cases receive swift attention, victims get the timely closure they need, and defendants’ rights to due process are safeguarded. To build a justice system that truly values human rights for all, we can no longer tolerate persistent delays.”

“To finally close Rikers Island, we must ensure criminal cases are resolved efficiently and fairly. The ambitious plan announced today, under the tremendous leadership of Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, will address many longstanding challenges in the courts. The Center for Justice Innovation is proud to partner in this vital work to bring key players together to identify and implement these commonsense solutions,” said **Courtney Bryan, Executive Director, Center for Justice Innovation**.

“I commend Chief Administrative Judge Zayas and First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge St. George for announcing these critical steps to fairly speed up criminal cases for people locked up in Rikers,” said **former Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Chair of the Independent Rikers Commission and Of Counsel at Latham & Watkins LLP**. “Rikers is a stain on our City and a detriment to public safety. No one should be jailed there a day longer than necessary. The holistic, comprehensive approach announced today is exactly the effort needed to help ensure people do not languish at Rikers awaiting resolution of their case -- and victims wait shorter periods for answers and accountability. On behalf of the Independent Rikers Commission, I thank Chief Judge Wilson, the Office of Court Administration and the Center for Justice Innovation for taking on this essential work and look forward to the fruits of their labor.”

“The business community applauds the courts for these initiatives to make the processing and adjudication of criminal cases more efficient. This will accelerate the delivery of justice and reduce the burden of extended jail terms on taxpayers,” said **Kathryn Wylde, President and CEO, Partnership for New York City**.

“We wholeheartedly support the initiative to reduce the criminal backlog and enhance the efficiency of our court system, particularly to minimize the time defendants spend incarcerated on Rikers Island. This achievement is a testament to the effective collaboration among the Unified Court System, the Center for Justice Innovation, defender organizations, and district attorneys across New York City. It is also the model for future court reform efforts. We commend Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, and the entire OCA leadership for their dedication to this crucial innovation,” said **Denise Kronstadt, Executive Director, Fund for Modern Courts**.

“The adoption of major administrative changes addressing serious delays in New York City criminal courts, including timelines on implementation and accountability measures to monitor progress are vital reforms. Chief Judge Wilson, Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, and the Center for Justice Innovation have taken a major step for fairness in our criminal justice system, addressing delays from the pandemic, and providing a real path for closing Rikers. These reforms have been discussed and debated for too many years, and it is significant that this court administration has acted,” said **Dean Fuleihan, Member of the Independent Rikers Commission, Senior Fellow at the CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance and former First Deputy Mayor of New York City.**

“The moves announced today by Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas will help ensure safe, efficient disposition of criminal cases, making sure people who are incarcerated pretrial receive the speedy disposition of justice and move us closer to reducing the population at—and finally closing—Rikers Island. With smarter, more just and effective case processing, we will be able to reinvest in our communities and create safety and justice for all New Yorkers,” said **Dr. Michael P. Jacobson, Executive Director of the CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance and Member of the Independent Rikers Commission.**

“For far too long, unnecessary delays have prolonged the time people spend on Rikers Island, often under traumatic and dehumanizing conditions. These new case management innovations will not only expedite the legal process for individuals caught in lengthy pretrial detention, but bring closure to victims and witnesses,” said **Stanley Richards, President and CEO of The Fortune Society.** “We applaud Chief Administrative Judge Zayas, First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge St. George, and the Center for Justice Innovation for prioritizing fairness, efficiency, and justice in addressing criminal case delays. These measures will reduce the number of people held at Rikers Island, moving us closer to the goal of closing the jail altogether and putting us on track to transition to safer, more humane borough-based facilities. By implementing these practical, common-sense reforms—particularly the focus on early disclosure of evidence and pretrial hearings—the courts are taking significant steps to ensure that justice is swift, fair, and balanced.”

“Faster and more efficient criminal cases are critical for our system to truly deliver justice, for both victims of crimes and those accused of crimes,” said **Jennifer Jones-Austin, CEO and Executive Director of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Member of the Independent Rikers Commission.** “The steps announced today by Chief Judge Wilson and Chief Administrative Judge Zayas will help our justice system live up to its ideals and ensure New Yorkers are not needlessly held in our jails—especially Rikers Island—for longer than absolutely necessary as they await their day in court.”

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